

Memorial Address.



William Mellen Chamberlain, M.D.



1826-1887.



ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE FUNERAL OF

William Mellen Chamberlain, M.D.

IN THE

WEST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

NEW YORK CITY,

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By FRANCIS BROWN,

PROFESSOR IN THE UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

MEMORIAL ADDRESS.



LIFE grown invisible is not life ended. We believe that God lives, though we do not see Him. We believe that the spiritual life is real, though it is hid with Christ in God. We believe in the everlasting life of those whom God has taken to Himself. We are mourners, but we are Christian mourners. We sit beside our dead, and look backward, and think the months and years over again, and we are unspeakably lonely, and our tears fall; but holy voices bid us not forget to turn our eyes and thoughts onward as well as backward. The brightness lies that way. Into that brightness have passed those who have left us in the love of God,—who are dear to us and dear to Him,—and in it we may find them again by-and-by; and so hope grows comforting, and the poison-sting is taken out of grief; expectancy claims its share of us, as well as memory, and the more confidently we expect, the more thankfully we can remember.

In the life just gone out of our sight there is much that is good to remember. Its chief outward experiences are quickly sketched. It began in that New England where so much good life has begun. Dr. Chamberlain was born at Hanover, New Hampshire, October 10th, 1826. His grandfather, General William Chamberlain, of Peacham, Vermont,

had been active in the political life of his State at a time when politics commanded sturdy character. His father was Professor William Chamberlain, who filled the chair of Latin and Greek at Dartmouth College, an accomplished scholar, an effective teacher, and a wise counsellor; his mother, the daughter of Dr. Joseph Gilman, of Wells, Maine, was a rare combination of firmness and gentleness, of intellectual force, and wise, sympathetic, practical judgment. The son and grandson inherited fine traits. His father died when he was but four years old, and his mother as he was entering manhood, but her impress was strong upon him, and undoubtedly those who knew them both, saw it, and felt it, until the very end. His native endowments were ample, and her positive and gracious influence contributed its full measure to their rounded development and to that character which enabled him to use them so well.

He studied at Phillips (Andover) Academy, and at Dartmouth, being graduated from college in 1845. The following years were spent partly in the study of theology, partly in teaching, and partly in the slow recovery from malarial disease acquired in the South, and found him at length devoted to the pursuit of medicine. This he continued, here and at Dartmouth, until 1853, when he was admitted to practice. His professional life, abundant in fruits and rich in the affection of friends and the esteem of the community, has been spent in this city and its neighborhood, with occasional interruptions, such as his service as surgeon in the army, and in the Sanitary Commission, in 1861 and

1862, and the absences of the last years in search of health.

He died at West Summit, New Jersey, on Monday, October 31st, 1887.

The man whose honorable course has thus been traced in outline had a marked individuality. Even a casual meeting with him left a distinct impression,—an impression with clear, clean outlines, which deepened as you met him oftener and knew him better. One observant of men would recognize him at once as an independent and vigorous thinker. His views were original, in the sense that they were the product of his own mental activity,—they were not second-hand opinions. Therefore he held them intelligently, he expressed them freshly and forcibly, he sustained them with reasons,—because he had thought his own way out to them, and had himself been convinced by them. Thus it was always worth while to listen to him. Without assuming the *rôle* of a conversationalist, he enjoyed conversation, and himself imparted to it both substance and a tone at once animated and intelligent. His talk was that of a man whose mind was wide awake, discursive, disciplined, and equally at home with ideas and with things. He expressed himself deliberately, without heat or excessive zeal of manner, still less with vanity or any trace of display, but with unusual precision and fitness, which added weight to a grave matter and a delicate flavor to that humorous interchange which he so keenly appreciated.

A watchful stranger might see as much as this, but in proportion as he ceased to be a stranger, he would see a

great deal more. It was impossible to know Dr. Chamberlain long without being struck by his intellectual range. He had opinions on the widest variety of subject. These opinions were based on some definite knowledge, kept ready to hand by a hospitable and tenacious memory. He was quite exceptional in the versatility of his mental habit. Questions in literature and in politics, in morals and in commercial and social life, in speculative theology and in practical religion all interested him; his mind dwelt on them, worked over them, and reached—not always decisive answers, but, at least, some well-defined conclusions, in which the limits of the known over against the unknown were distinctly recognized. This catholicity of mental interest did not turn his mind into a mere receptacle for diversified and disconnected bits of knowledge; his information and his views were not merely taken on storage, from this strange household and that. He passed naturally from individual things to the relation of things. He took real enjoyment in tracing out obscure connections, or, rather, connections that were obscure to many were obvious to him. The combination of units into an organic whole was to him an attractive exercise. His judgments had usually a wide basis, and were comprehensive as well as sober and mature. He had his impulsive thoughts, like most men of athletic mind, but even these were the impulses of a trained man—not accidental, and not mere vagaries,—and they were subjected to calm scrutiny before they took their place among his settled convictions. He was eminently rational,—accustomed to accept reasonable

views. He surveyed things with intellectual composure, turned them about, considered their various sides, formed his judgments with the leisureliness—not of an idler, but of one who shunned the spendthrift errors of haste, and then rested securely in them. They had in this way a noticeable solidity and trustworthiness, and even when one differed with him the effect of his opinions was to stimulate and clarify.

It has seemed well to devote a little space to this aspect of the man, because the mental life was a large share of his life, and because his aptitudes and habits of thought, one may easily venture to say, made him, intellectually, one of the most interesting men that New York could show.

The breadth and evenness of his mind did not preclude a special fondness for special subjects. His early associations and training were scholarly and literary. His life, in the most impressionable period of it, was spent in communities where education and classic culture were held in high esteem,—in Hanover and at Andover. His tastes in mature years were largely determined by this influence. He was fond of literature in its various forms, descriptive, analytic and imaginative, and was himself the master of a singularly attractive and effective literary style.

He was greatly interested in men, in the movements of human thought, in the development of human character and the operation of social forces. He enjoyed travel for the human interest of it, as well as for the beauty and grandeur of the earth, with which it made him familiar.

Above all, he was interested in his professional work. It is evident that he came to it with a varied and generous equipment. It was his chosen calling, not entered hastily,—he took his degree in medicine eight years after his graduation from college,—and he pursued it all the more successfully for his broad cultivation of mind. Education, as he thought of it, was more than an apprenticeship to some refined trade. It was the development and instruction of the entire personality of the man, useful in a professional career, no doubt, but in itself desirable and worthy, and all the more useful because of its independent, intrinsic value. His general education was the substratum of his medical attainments, a foundation secure for the very reason that it was not simply medical. As a physician he was a constant student and a careful practitioner. He studied his cases with great conscientiousness. He was watchful and observant, and his diagnosis was no snap-judgment. He was apt to be cautious in expressing a professional opinion, for emphasis meant a great deal to him. He felt what it signified to express himself without reserve. But when his mind was made up, what he said was apt to have lasting professional value. It was his delight to fully grasp a subject, and his contributions to medical journals were characterized not only by perspicuity and literary finish, but by mastery.* The respect

* Among these contributions were papers on "Chloroform in Delirium Tremens," "Posture in Disease," "Acute Atrophy of the Liver," "Aneurism of the Aorta," "Puerperal Diseases of the Kidney," "Nitrous Oxide," etc., etc. He was also the author of a novel in the "No Name" series, entitled "Manuela Paredes," based upon a case of mania occurring in his own observation.

in which he was held is made evident by his steady practice, and by the many distinguished positions he occupied in the public service, and in connection with medical societies, colleges and hospitals.* He filled each one of them with dignity and competence. Each new responsibility was a new opportunity, and its efficient discharge brought him new respect and regard. He devised several professional instruments, some of permanent service, and bearing his name.†

His death is the loss to the medical profession of a man whose type is rare in any profession, and who can ill be spared, in days when in all vocations it is easy to specialize

* He had entered the Charity Hospital in 1851, as Interne, and in 1853 succeeded Dr. W. Kelly as Physician in Charge. In 1857 he was appointed Professor in the Woodstock Medical College, but did not accept. In 1861 he offered his services to the Government and became a "Brigade Surgeon" (No. 13 on the list). He resigned to accept the position of Correspondent of the U. S. Sanitary Commission, and accompanied the Army of the Potomac in this capacity until after the battle of Antietam, September, 1862. Having resumed practice in New York, he was appointed (December, 1862), Examining Surgeon of the U. S. Pension Bureau for New York City. In 1863 he succeeded Dr. Chas. A. Budd as Lecturer on Obstetrics in the N. Y. Medical College. From 1865 to 1872 he was Physician to the Demilt Dispensary, succeeding the late Dr. E. R. Peaslee in the "Department of the Diseases of Women." From 1871 to 1885 he was Surgeon to Charity Hospital in the "Gynæcological Department." In 1881 he became President of the Medical Board of this hospital, and when, in 1885, he resigned the position of Visiting Physician, he was appointed Consulting Physician to the same institution, having been recommended by the unanimous vote of his colleagues. From 1865 to 1869 he was Secretary of the N. Y. Academy of Medicine. He was made Vice-President of the N. Y. Obstetrical Society in 1879; Permanent Member of the N. Y. State Medical Society in 1881; Corresponding Fellow of the Boston Gynæcological Society, and Honorary Member of the Yonkers Medical Society in 1882; Corresponding Fellow of the N. Y. Obstetrical Society (on resigning active Fellowship) in November, 1885, and Fellow of the American Public Health Association at Washington, December 10th, 1885.

† Irrigators of glass, known as "Chamberlain's Tubes," employed with various modifications, both at home and abroad, in certain forms of fever.

till one loses manly breadth, and to let rivalry take the place of whole-souled service in a noble calling. The loss is none the less severe that it came, in part, three years ago, when precarious health interrupted his practice in this city. He was one of the men whom a wise profession or a wise community longs to retain and sadly misses when they go. This was a man not yet old,—ripe in all his powers. We cannot help wishing, for the sake of those large human interests he had so much at heart, that he might have stayed a little longer.

But, after all, this wish is strong mainly because there was something in him deeper than the abilities we have been speaking of, by as much as character is more profound than intellectual habit and professional skill. Intellectual force is sometimes joined with heartlessness or moral weakness, and professional talent with personal narrowness and insignificance. In Dr. Chamberlain the case was different. Each phase of his life showed thought dominated by moral conviction, and responding with a quick sensibility to the obligations of human life. His devotion to professional responsibilities was a main channel through which his acute sympathy, large appreciation and delicate tenderness poured itself, as well as his mental virility and his acquired learning. His patients not only trusted him, but loved him, and with reason, for his faithfulness to them was not mere scientific zeal, nor a perfunctory discharge of unavoidable duty; it displayed a genuine personal interest and concern. It was a warm, generous nature satisfying itself by helping those

for whom it individually and really cared, in the use of all appliances for relieving pain, staying disease and removing obstacles to the self-assertion of healthy nature. Those whom he treated became, to a very marked degree, his personal friends; and he greatly prized these friends, and responded to their attachment with his own. Neither in this regard, nor any other, did the self-seeking temper control his professional life. If it had, he might perhaps have been a more wealthy man, and a more famous man, but he would not have been a more noble man. Indeed, as already hinted, to make a parade was never an affair of his. He had no zeal for great reputation—was not selfishly ambitious. It was mentioned, a few moments ago, that he contributed valuable papers to medical literature. He might have made a great name for himself in this field. He had the mental and the literary gifts for it. But it was an inward movement,—the desire to express what seemed to him of value,—that produced his medical papers, and not the hope of plaudits from his fellows. He was not indifferent to their good opinion—no healthy nature is,—but he desired no good opinion based on grounds that could not satisfy himself. His standard was high, and he measured himself by it first of all. That was the secret of his deliberateness in production, and one chief reason why he produced less than many men his intellectual and medical inferiors.

He was a singularly honest man. Sincerity was in the grain of his thought and speech. He surprised people occasionally by an abruptness which seemed brusque. It

was simply the plain truthfulness of the man. It was the quality which, even more than his mental grasp, made you feel sure of him, and depend upon him. It was the quality that mated itself with his genuine respect for men, and made him just. He was not impatient of divergent views. He lacked the small conceit which cannot brook counter-argument. He was not unwilling to be convinced. He had no desire to seem eccentric. He recognized the value of public opinion and social usage. Shams he hated, but even conventionalities, with a reason for them, would gain his support. There was a true modesty in his relations with men, but his bearing would be perhaps best characterized as a strong, equable self-respect, which involved a regard for other selves. He was therefore discriminating and judicial in criticism, never a violent partisan, and never malicious.

He was in all things a very generous man. Sordid motives he did not personally understand, though his sharp observation could detect them in others, but any appeal to high qualities found its answer in him. The less he had of sentimentality, the greater was his readiness to yield to lofty motives. He was emphatically a patriotic man, and a good citizen. He put himself at his country's service when the need came. He assumed irksome burdens for the community, quietly, even apologetically, because he could not help it. His enthusiasms,—for, with all his self-command, he had them,—were never petty, and he did not spare himself when they made demands upon him. His

home abounded in hospitality. His friends knew where they could find him. He entered into their problems, and helped to untie their hard knots with his sympathetic fingers. His mother's tender affectionateness, and his sisters', was present in him, even when he did not show it,—and he shrank from showing it. Some of the most beautiful things in his character were rarely seen; some were not even known to many. He could not make an exhibition of them, and perhaps he sometimes guarded too jealously what in his heart was most sacred, letting people think him cool, when he was only concerned not to profane.

He had a keen ethical sense, revolting at the base, the cruel and the unclean, and reverencing the good wherever it might be found. The moral law spoke to him in imperatives. With all his geniality of temper, no personal relations made him swerve in moral judgments. If he had not been a Christian he might have been a Stoic, though without the Stoic's superciliousness and harshness, such was his reverence for virtue, and the loyalty of his soul to the claims of conscience.

The qualities just referred to entered into his religious life. This was equally without concealment and without display. When he was quite young he made a public avowal of his faith, and became a member of the College Church at Hanover. For years he was connected with the Broadway Tabernacle of this city, whose pastor, the Rev. Joseph P. Thompson, D.D.,—scholar, patriot and Christian,—was his intimate friend; for other years with the West

Church, of which he was a member when he died.

His religious faith was very strong, and his religious experience deep, although he did not say much about them. They were of neither the emotional nor the dogmatic type. Excessive demonstrations were distasteful to him,—and demonstrations of personal feeling became excessive, in his view sooner than in the view of many Christian people. What was spasmodic, intermittent, was out of keeping with the steady current of his mind. One had to know him well to understand, from the whole bent and set of his life, with side-lights from occasional and often, I suppose, unconscious hints, how abundant and how sacred the genuine religious feeling was in him, how high and sure his aspirations were, and what a deep anchorage held his fidelity to righteousness.

On the other hand, his mental honesty, and his high regard for the reality of things made him reserved in dogmatic statement about the unseen. He did not slight theology, but he disliked cant. Nothing was further from his temper than a repose in formulas offered for acceptance in virtue of a traditional stamp. He had no hesitation in dissecting the formulas, and what he received he received as truth that had been tested and proved. But the grounds of his faith were more fundamental than dogma, and discussion of this or that theological problem did not shake them. God and Christ were real to him. The divine words were his guide and his comfort. Into the spirit of the majestic hymns in which Christian life has uttered itself, and Christian worship

taken form, he could enter, and did enter, with a sense of enlargement and of divine fellowship. He believed in immortality, and he showed no fear of death. In his long and wearisome illness, marked by the patience and considerateness that always appeared in him when he had burdens of responsibility, or anxiety, or sorrow to bear, there was no trepidation. At times he seemed hopeful, but at the bottom I doubt if he was under any illusion;—certainly of late he was not. He faced the stern, inevitable facts, but made no ado about them;—partly, one cannot question, from a wish to spare those dear to him all needless pain, partly from the firm quality of his mind, by which he preferred to take the full truth into account, and partly from convictions, which, as the change drew near, became expectations.

And so that which is seen and temporal came to its end for him, and he entered upon the larger, freer life, amid the things which are unseen and eternal.

These are rich memories, dear friends,—you who were very close to him,—these are rich memories that remain to us. Your thought will add to them countless others, still more precious, more private, more exclusively yours, which I have not trusted myself to dwell on, and which I could not adequately recall, though I speak out of affection and respect, not only personal, but inherited,—a legacy very sacred to me. In all these recollections you will find sadness, but you will find comfort. I wish that you, and I, and all of us who knew him, might perceive what was gracious

and strong and fine in him repeating itself in us, and let recollection be transformed into noble character.

And we shall not forget,—I am sure we shall not,—the thought we began with. We have been looking backward, and saying, “He was,” “He had,”—when the best of the powers he had, he has still, and the best of what he was, he is. Out of our sight, with God, redeemed by Christ, without weakness, and with no possibility of mistake or waste, that spacious intellect is satisfied, and will be satisfied forever, with truth we cannot yet reach to; that warm, strong heart is gladdened, and will be gladdened forever, with heavenly communion; that joy in service will find its noblest, its endless exercise. The separation is hard, is bitter for us, but he already begins to understand the contrast between “our light affliction, which is for the moment,” and the “eternal weight of glory.” He is not really lost to us. We know where he is, and with whom he is; and we know the way.

